

## Health & wellbeing

# 'I felt my life was over'

Having suffered for years from debilitating illness, Martina Hinds is now a different person, for which she credits the Bowen technique. She tells Sarah Foster how it has changed her life

It seems hard to believe looking at Martina today, a chatty and vibrant mum-of-three, but in her 20s, she felt her life was effectively over. An earlier bout of illness, suspected to be the chronic fatigue syndrome ME, had led to an even worse deterioration in health.

Martina was part-way through a computing degree, studying as a mature student at Sunderland University, and her life ground to a halt. "My symptoms were unbelievable," she says. "I got diagnosed with fibromyalgia, which is a combination of chronic fatigue and ME, and I was put on tons of painkillers. I started having a procaine infusion in hospital to control the pain. I was given so much medication that I blew up and I must have been about three stone heavier. My mobility got really bad and I ended up having to use a wheelchair on and off."

In addition to fibromyalgia, Martina, 39, was found to have cervical spondylosis, a type of arthritis which led to a lot of inflammation and further pain. Even the simplest of actions caused her agony.

"With the fibromyalgia, every muscle in your body hurts," she says. "To even sit on the toilet hurts. You never go into the deep level of sleep you need for your body to repair, so you also have memory loss."

It was a huge struggle, but Martina completed her degree, then gained an adult education teaching qualification. Her fragile health, however, made it impossible to work, which she found devastating. "I didn't become a total recluse, but everybody I knew had moved on and they were all doing really well," she says. "I used to be mortified if I bumped into them. I just used to try to avoid people. I remember thinking my life was over."

Under the care of a rheumatologist, Martina was prescribed the anti-depressant Prozac. She was reluctant to take it, but the pain gave her no choice. "The worst medication I was on was Prozac," she says. "I think I must have been on it for five years. I know when I first went on it I cringed – I was mortified. I couldn't tell my husband Matt. A couple of the other drugs I was on are now banned. I ended up with

a damaged stomach because of all the medication – and I was put on medication for that."

Disillusioned with the drugs, and convinced there must be a better alternative, Martina sought help from a homeopath. It marked a turning point. "When I went to see her, I saw a huge improvement," she says. "It was probably more on an emotional or mental level, although she did help with some of the physical things. I was still having, every so often, to fall back on prescription drugs, which I didn't want to do."

The answer came by chance. Martina was in the homeopath's waiting room when she spotted a leaflet about the Bowen technique, a therapy using gentle but highly targeted moves to stimulate the body's natural healing process. She had never heard of it, but decided to give it a go. The results were astounding.

"I thought 'my God this really works'," she says. "I think the first thing I noticed was an improvement in the pins and needles in my hands and feet, which were really bad. When I would stand up, it was like walking on glass. I found that was one of the first symptoms to resolve really quickly."

FOR the first time, she felt in control of her own health – and had the confidence to come off the medication.

"I tried for a couple of years with the homeopath to come off Prozac and in the end, two years ago, I decided to go cold turkey," she says. "I was like a junkie. I had the shakes and all that sort of thing. It's a very addictive drug and that's why many people will never come off it."

An unexpected bonus to receiving Bowen treatment was the discovery that Martina had a pelvic tilt. Having had two miscarriages, she thought this might be why and her therapist worked to correct it. Martina and Matt already had a son, Connor, 17, but were keen to extend their family. After starting on Bowen, Martina had daughter Megan, now five.

"We were thinking of giving up trying and adopting, then I accidentally fell pregnant and it was fine," she says. "I think it was because I was putting the balance back in my body."

When Megan was a baby, Martina started



Martina with husband Matt and daughters Ciara and Megan Picture: TOM BANKS

seeing a nutritional therapist, who identified a number of food intolerances. Changing her diet, along with homeopathy and regular Bowen treatments, resulted in making her better. She now has another daughter, Ciara, three, and has qualified as a Bowen therapist.

Martina now runs an adults' clinic at Houghton Sports Centre, near Durham, every Saturday, and a children's clinic every other Saturday from her home in Houghton-le-Spring. This operates by donation and treats conditions like cerebral palsy, autism and chronic asthma. Martina is passionate about it.

"The results are amazing," she says. "There's a huge window of opportunity when children are born and are diagnosed with these conditions and it's totally missed. If you can get a child under seven years of age it's amazing what you can do. In just a few weeks of treatment, I see a difference."

One of Martina's success stories is a little boy whose hand was clenched. She treated him with Bowen and encouraged him to pretend he was a snake trying to grab an apple, and now he can clap his hands. She is also a hit with old ladies. "A lady rang me up and said 'are you the bunion lady?', she laughs, recounting a tale of how she helped rid a member of the WI of her bunion.

Currently, while Martina's own health may not be perfect, overall she is pretty well, for which she credits Bowen. "I would be lying if I said I was totally cured, but I would say I'm totally managing my health," she says. "I go for monthly Bowen treatments and that's what keeps me in work and what keeps me well. It's worth it – I can't put a price on my health."

■ Martina's clinic for adults is at Houghton Sports Centre from 10am to 3.30pm on Saturdays, and children can be treated at her home every other Sunday. For details visit [martinahinds.com](http://martinahinds.com)

## Feelgood facts

### HUG IT OUT

Nothing beats a good cuddle and hugs can actually fight stress. Levels of the hormone cortisol were found to drop when women hugged their partners for just 20 seconds, according to scientists at the University of North Carolina. If you can't find a person, grab a teddy bear.

### JUST DANCE

Exercise releases endorphins, the body's feel-good chemicals – and what could be better than a quick blast of your favourite song and a dance around your living room? If you're running late for work, just sing your heart out in the shower and you'll feel better in no time.

### SUGAR BOOST

A couple of squares of chocolate will brighten up any day. But don't be tempted to eat a whole bar because the comedown from all that sugar will make you feel worse. If you're on a diet, reach for the dark chocolate, which scientists believe might have the same effect on muscles as exercise.

### HAVE A BANANA

If you're given the choice between a doughnut and a banana, go for the fruit option. A healthy diet packed with fruit and vegetables will give you more energy, help you lose weight and boosts your immune system too, which should help fight off those colds.



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